



Campaign News

Djamel Fahassi



As many of you will know the Cardiff group of Amnesty International has worked for many years on case of Djamel Fahassi, an Algerian journalist who "disappeared" in 1995.

Recently Naomi received an e-mail from Safia, Djamel's wife:

*Dear Naomi,
I'm so sorry not to write to you soon because my connection was cut also my telephone. Anyway, I miss you a lot and I wish we could have an opportunity to meet soon. I'm also writing to thank you for all what you are doing and this is seen through the hundreds of cards I', receiving every day and that I don't know how to thank them. I also hope all is fine with you and that you and your family are doing very well. I wish you a very happy new year.
Safia*

In our next meeting we will have guest speaker Hugh Sandeman, Amnesty UK's Algeria co-ordinator who will update on the situation in the country and help us plan next steps in our campaign for the truth about Djamel's "disappearance".

Burma



One of the group's key focus areas for 2011/12 has been Burma and the situation is rapidly changing. Recently another 600 prisoners were released but over 1,000 political prisoners remain in Burma.

We have three forthcoming events on Burma:

26 January (7pm Temple of Peace)

"Burma: Continuing Problems, New Prospects?"

with Julie Morgan, AM Cardiff North and Moe Bu, campaigner in exile, Burma Campaign

12 March

Tony Fairman, Amnesty UK's Burma Co-ordinator will be speaking at our monthly meeting

24 March

Campaigning event in The Hayes – as many volunteers as possible needed!

Please keep watching the news and Amnesty website for the latest developments in Burma.

Group News

Amnesty Wales Office

As we reported in the last newsletter, Amnesty plans to close the Amnesty office in Cardiff, following the departure of Cathy Owens and Lisa Jones at the end of this month.

We discussed the matter in our January meeting and the chair and secretary submitted a response to the consultation on behalf of the group. A copy has been e-mailed to group members with this newsletter.

Tim Hancock, Campaigns Director of Amnesty International UK responded:

Thanks so much for the response. I'm really pleased that you found the time to discuss the proposals. Please accept my apologies for the tight turnaround. We were aiming to reach decisions this Thursday, as it is close to the deadline for lease renewal at the Cathedral Road premises.

It might be useful to provide a brief update, which I'd be grateful if you could share with the Cardiff Group in due course. We have decided to give notice on the current premises. No-one has opposed this decision and it is the one that has the hardest deadline attached to it. We are however, taking a little longer to think about the responsibilities of the new post in Wales.

I am close to accepting the argument for a mixed post and have asked for proposals on objectives and priorities for the post. It's too early to say what the outcome of these deliberations will be but your thinking and mine are becoming fairly close.

I'll let you know of any significant developments or decisions.

For the moment, thanks again for the comments.

*With best wishes
Tim*

AIUK National Conference & AGM

It will be held At Manchester University 13-15 April 2012. Book by 2nd March 2012. Key issue will be the 2012 Global Arms Trade Treaty. For more conference details, see www.amnesty.org.uk/agm

January Meeting Report Arms Trade Treaty

Our guest speaker in January was Costa Asprou, our former group secretary, who has been working in London for AIUK on the human rights issues relating to the international Arms

Trade Treaty (ATT) which the UN has been preparing for completion in July 2012.

Introduction

Costa started by reminding us of how critical this first global arms treaty is to human rights: it is vital that human rights are fully embedded in this UN treaty, hence Amnesty's call for a 'bullet proof' Global Arms Trade Treaty!

We need to appreciate the impact of the current arms trade on human rights: more than one person dies every minute from armed violence. In the 1990s it is estimated that conventional weapons killed five million people and forced 50 million to flee their homes. Between 1/3 and 3/4 of all human rights abuses reported by Amnesty involve the use of arms.

At the moment there is no international arms trade treaty. The global nature of the arms trade requires a global agreement with legally binding obligations, hence the importance of the ATT.



Amnesty's key priorities for the ATT

Amnesty is asking the fundamental question: is this 2012 treaty to be a technical regulation of the global arms trade, or is it to be rooted in core humanitarian principles? At the heart of its campaign on this treaty is its 'golden rule': 'the rules (in the treaty) should state that transfers of weapons or munitions should be stopped if there is evidence that they are likely to be used in serious violation of international law, e.g. human rights or humanitarian law'. To this end Amnesty advocates that the ATT must be comprehensive, covering all weapons and military equipment.

Furthermore, Amnesty argues, the treaty must apply to all arms transfers and deals, ensuring that arms middlemen come within its provisions. Amnesty emphasises that proper enforcement of the treaty's obligations must include adequate reporting and transparency measures to highlight abuses.

The role of the UK government

Amnesty is mindful that over recent years the UK Government, including the present one, has taken a lead in advocating a strong and effective ATT. We need a key government like the UK, with a UN Security Council and EU position, to be a firm supporter of proper human rights protection in the 2012 treaty. However, and disturbingly from Amnesty's standpoint, recently there has been evidence that the UK government may be reining back on such a commitment.

Action by Amnesty on the ATT

Initiatives include:

1. Amnesty is asking members and groups to write to the British party leaders at Westminster urging them to make sure that the UK advocates for the strongest possible treaty – with strong human rights rules and comprehensive scope (specimen letter is available on p7 on the 'AIUK Group Campaign Update' on the ATT – website address below).
http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_22181.pdf
2. Support for the Control Arms Coalition campaign re ATT
<http://controlarms.org/speak-out>

Discussion points

1. Why would countries sign up to this treaty if they are currently willing to sell to repressive regimes?
2. This treaty could actually end up undermining existing human rights conventions and obligations if human rights are not firmly embedded in the 2012 ATT.
3. We need to be mindful of how to control the sale of contingent technologies to arms which are an increasingly important part of the repressive armoury of weapons available today. A case in point is the sale of internet interception and monitoring equipment.
4. Regarding how the CAAT (the Campaign Against Arms Trade) fits into the ATT Campaign, the Control Arms Coalition (Amnesty UK, Oxfam, IANSA and others) has worked with Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) over a number of issues such as co-arm, where NGOs discuss export controls for weapons with the UK government. CAAT has its own stance on

the ATT itself, and it's best to contact them or check their website for this.

5. If the UK does push for strong human rights rules in the ATT (and intends to implement them), it won't really just stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia for example will it? Good question - If the 'golden rule' on human rights makes it into the Treaty (no transfers where there is substantial risk of serious human rights abuses) - then there will be a risk assessment made on each arms transfer. So rather than having a blanket ban on transfers to certain countries, the ATT would require the UK government to consider each weapons transfer, and assess if there is a substantial risk that they will be used to commit human rights abuses. This includes (but Amnesty argues should not be limited to) considering past evidence of human rights abuses by the end-user. If there is a substantial risk, then the UK government would be obliged to prohibit the transfer.

We thank Costa for coming down from London to see us and we look forward to hearing more of his work with Amnesty UK.

Our next meetings

Our main meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm in the Quaker Meeting House (downstairs meeting room), Charles Street, Cardiff city centre. Meetings are generally pretty informal and everyone is welcome.

Planning meetings are held on the fourth Monday of the month at 7.30pm in Chapter Arts Centre (in the bar) – again, everyone is welcome to join us.

Thursday 26th January
Burma: Continuing Problems, New Prospects?
(Temple of Peace, Cathays Park 7.00pm)

Julie Morgan, AM Cardiff North and
Moe Bu, campaigner in exile, Burma Campaign

Monday 30th January
Burma planning
(Cathays Methodist Church 7.30pm)

The small sub-group we have set up to plan the Burma event will be meeting in Cathays Methodist Church (opposite Domino's Pizza on Crwys Road) at 7.30pm.

Monday 13th February
Algeria and Djamel Fahassi
(Quaker Meeting House 7.30pm)

Guest speaker Hugh Sandeman, Amnesty's
Algeria co-ordinator.

Contact us

Full details of the Cardiff Amnesty Group can be found at www.amnestycardiff.org.uk. Here you will find details of our current campaigns and forthcoming events. The site has had a recent refresh so why not let us know what you think!



We also have a Facebook page at
www.facebook.com/amnestycardiff

If you would like to contact the Cardiff Group of Amnesty International please e-mail
amnesty.cardiff@btopenworld.com